

THE GECKO, *GEHYRA AUSTRALIS*, FEEDING ON THE SAP OF *ACACIA HOLOSERICEA*.

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Australian geckos are thought to primarily be arthropod feeders (Pianka & Pianka 1976; Greer 1989). However, there have been several observations of captive and free-ranging geckos feeding on sugary solutions, nectar and sap (Cogger *et al.* 1983 cited in Couper *et al.* 1995; Dell 1985; Greer 1989; King & Horner 1993; Couper *et al.* 1995). Of these observations, Dell (1985) and Couper *et al.* (1995) have reported geckos feeding on the sap of *Acacia* spp. The arboreal gecko, *Hoplodactylus duvacei* from New Zealand is known to feed on a variety of foods including insects, berries and nectar (Robb 1980).

We made the following observation on May 6th, 1996, in open woodland near Durack River homestead (127°21' S; 15°49' E) in the Kimberley Region, north-west Australia. At approximately 2100h an individual *Gehyra australis* (approximately 100 mm snout vent length) was observed head downward on the trunk of an *Acacia holosericea*. On closer examination the lizard was seen to repeatedly lick an exudate from a wound to the tree. The exudate appeared to be sap or gum and consisted of two components, a crumbly

“crystalline” portion and a harder more solid portion. The lizard was lapping at the crumbly portion. No insects were observed in the vicinity. This behaviour was observed for approximately 10 minutes and photographed (M.L.).

The contribution that plant exudates make to the dietary intake of arboreal Australian geckos is currently unknown (Dell 1985; Greer 1989). Nectars and *Acacia* gums are high in carbohydrates (Low 1991; Latz 1995) and, when available, could represent a significant and easily obtained energy source for geckos. The ability of geckos to lick (Greer 1989; King & Horner 1993) may also predispose arboreal species to exploit these resources. However, determining the contribution that energy rich plant exudates make to the diet of geckos, through traditional studies of gut contents, is hampered by the ease with which liquid substances high in sugars are digested (Couper *et al.* 1995). Numerous observations of arboreal Australian geckos, particularly *Gehyra* spp., feeding on plant exudates suggest that some species may be omnivorous (Dell 1985; Couper *et al.* 1995).

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